A NEW VOCATION

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COALITION FOR THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

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THE BEGINNING OF A NEW VOCATION

Sermon preached at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York,
on the Feast of the Dedication, October 3, 1976

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Bishop Suffragan of Dallas

WORDS OF JESUS to his disciples in the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to St Luke: "Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Jesus was always saying things like this. He said them because he was a faithful Jew; because he had received the Word of God in the Old Testament; because, therefore, he knew the doctrine of the remnant — that is, God's way of working — not through the multitude; not through majorities; not, as we would say, through good ratings. He works through the few rather than the many. Even within his own people he works through some, not all. And once and for all, he worked through One. Because in Jesus himself, the remnant was reduced to One: One crucified, One dead, One buried, but One risen. And when he rose from the dead, again he said one of those things.

It was in a room where the disciples were gathered for fear. Jesus came and he identified himself, not only by his beautiful face or the look in his eyes, but by his wound-prints. And he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. As my Father has sent me, even so send I you." That time there were eleven. That was the foundation of the apostolic ministry.

We've come together today to celebrate the feast of the dedication of this church, a church which knows something of what it means to be part of the remnant, the Catholic remnant within the Church of God. It has a long and a glorious memory. For this has been a place which did not stand through a century with a tremendous and a great following. But it stood fast. It stood beautiful. It stood joyful for the reality of supernatural religion. And in this place, time and time again, there has been a deep sense of being almost alone. Yet this place has not only survived, it has become a radiating center of the glory of God, and of the reality and invincibility of the apostolic ministry and the sacramental religion which flows from it. Therefore this is a good place to be today.

I am here today because I received an invitation from the Rector, very shortly after I was elected bishop and before I was consecrated, to come and to preach on this morning and to say something — I

hope from the Lord — about whatever might have happened in another place: in the General Convention in Minneapolis.

And so, I am here. I am here to say what I have to say under this text which I gave to you, the words of Jesus: "Fear not . . ." Why do I say that? I say it because of a deep and tremendous conviction, not in spite of what we went through but because of what we went through. For, as you know, on the 16th day of September the General Convention authorized the ordination of women to the episcopate and the priesthood. This is an action which is contrary to our conviction about the nature of God's covenant with his people in the matter of the apostolate. Yet it was authorized. Many of us were filled with a tremendous sense of astonishment and shock.

When I went to the convention, it seemed to me that my work would be primarily political, uncongenial though that is to my very being. I found, though some burden of responsibility was laid upon me in that fashion, that the great work which was necessary for me to do was pastoral — not political but pastoral: to deal with the grief; to deal with the sense of hopelessness; to deal with the sense of depression which seemed to settle over so many of those who call themselves Catholic Christians. The question came time and time again: Where can we go? The answer is clear: Nowhere! To this Church we are sent; in this Church we shall abide. I said before the convention, I say it now again to you: I am not threatening to leave, I am threatening to stay! Because there is a deep and tremendous sense which I would communicate to you this day, that on the 17th day of September we received a new vocation from God: to be a powerful presence within the Church.

First of all, perhaps, it is important to say a word about why we have this tremendous sense that it is God's purpose that the episcopate and the priesthood should be male; not to argue this — for the time is short — but simply to affirm it once again. The source of that affirmation is this: that there is One High Priest, One only, One Priest alone, Jesus Christ. He has been sent to us not to be a great hieratic figure, now sublimely safe within the heavens. He has been sent to us to live among us, to suffer, to sweat an anguished sweat, a fearful sweat in the garden of Gethsemane, to die in dereliction in an atrocious way, to be buried, and to rise again to be our Priest. This is not simply the act of a man of tremendous religious genius and beautiful person — not simply the act of a man of sublime goodness and self-sacrifice and freedom. It is the act of One

who is sent. This is the Incarnation — the Enfleshment. He is the God-man, and the form of his flesh is male. This is one of the given realities in our faith. We cannot revise Jesus Christ to fit a current ideology — to fit our own peculiar needs. This is given. Part of supernatural faith is the awareness that God is the giver of what we receive in revelation, and that this revelation persists in Christ's own choice of his apostles — that this persists in unbroken tradition for 2000 years. Especially in these days when we are acutely aware of the Holy Spirit, we must read this history as an expression of the mind and the work of the Spirit, persistent even in the most extraordinarily different sexual and cultural situations. Here is one of the given phenomena of the life of the Holy Spirit within the Church of God. This we have received. This is part of the Christian faith and the Christian tradition as this Church has received it.

We have now unilaterally undertaken to revise this God-given, Spirit-expressed reality. We have revised it by less than a two-thirds vote in the House of Bishops and a bare majority in the House of Deputies. And this, let it be said, is a very strange way to make Christian doctrine. Because it is so strange — because it is quite contrary to the Anglican way — because it is indeed contrary to the way we are sworn as deacons, priests, and bishops to observe, there have been some of us who are bishops in this Church who have made public proclamation of the fact that this cannot be our way. I am sure that you are aware that at the time of this action in the House of Bishops there was a declaration made publicly, openly, no matter what the vote, by thirty-five men whose signatures still stand upon this document which I read to you:

> We stand committed to the Episcopal Church, and we are determined to live and work within it. We cannot accept with a good conscience the action of this House. We believe that to do so would violate our ordination vows to be faithful to and to defend the Word of God in Holy Scripture.
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> Furthermore, we cannot acknowledge the authority of this General Convention to decide unilaterally and in the face of the expressed disapproval of our Roman, Old Catholic, and Orthodox brethren, a question which ought to be decided by an ecumenical consensus.

The ordination and consecration of women priests and bishops will raise for us the gravest questions, that is, how far this

Church can accept such ministrations without fatally compromising its position as a Catholic and Apostolic body. We ask our brothers in this House to take to heart our resolution. We ask the whole Church to take note of our unshaken loyalty to the Episcopal Church, its teachings, its spirituality, its priesthood, and its sacraments.

The situation is now that we have an internal schism within the Church. It is not a break in sacramental fellowship based on anger, or on any kind of punitive desire to exercise power over others. It is based on a very simple thing and a very awful thing, and that is our inability to believe that any ordination of women to the priestly orders could have the assurance of sacramental efficacy. That is to say that any absolution, any consecration, any blessing, are at least in question. There are some of us who would go so far as to say that this priesthood is no priesthood, and that this Eucharist would be no Eucharist. This has to be said in sadness. It is not something which has been said first by Anglicans. It has been said by a continually growing body of Churchmen within the Church in Sweden, which also has apostolic order and which began ordaining women to the priesthood in 1958. And therefore within that Church there are — as there shall be within ours — two streams of sacramental life flowing within a particular part of the holy river of God.

Why did it happen? This may seem to be a moment for blame. That would be pernicious. I think there are powers which have been at work within the Church which we have not been able to discern — which we have not perhaps identified until we came to this point of disaster. The chief thing is this: we have forgotten the injunction of the Apostle not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind in the mind of Christ. What has happened is that we have, almost without noticing it, appropriated a secular world view, in this case a secular view of sexuality, a secular view of the nature of ministry as profession. This comes from a secularization of our perspective on life, human behavior, and the Church. We have conformed the Church to the world. There is another fact: for a long time we have not exercised profoundly and deeply our awareness of Holy Scripture — of that scriptural Catholicism which is Anglicanism. Too often, when we tried to identify what is Catholic, we had a way of looking at another body, at the Latin Church. Lately that Church has gone through a period of demoralization, manifested dramatically in recent days by

large groups of nuns in a crisis of identity who, having lost their first, seek another identity in the identity of priesthood. Is this the voice of Catholicism or is it the voice of demoralization? For a long time, we thought well of Roman Catholics who would speak well of us. We felt that the future of the Church — of the Latin Church — would surely be found in such voices as that of Hans Küng. There is a simple fact, my brothers and sisters, and that is that he's not going to be the next Pope. But radical Romanism disastrously fired our imagination. It burned in our minds as the true renewal of Catholicism — which it is not. We shall be renewed only when we return to the Source.

What then? Not, where shall we go? but, what shall we do? What is this new vocation that has descended upon us? Because I do have a word from the Lord for you this morning. I say that word with total assurance: we have a new vocation. In the strange providence of God, yes, in the strange humor of God, this action is the divinely given shock which is to stimulate us into new life and into Catholic revival once again, and to make us a vivid and a powerful presence within the whole Church of God. This is the inner meaning of this event. I met a marvelous, aged, peaceful monk who said first, "What can I do?" And then he said to me, "The Lord knows what he's doing." This seems to escape the attention of some.

And so, what is it that we do? We must repent— not blame, repent. I say this with deep conviction. A year ago in Eastertide I sat in the study of Michael Ramsey, the great friend of this parish, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and the perpetual patriarch of the Anglican Communion. I said to him, "What would you say is the present state of the Catholic movement in the Church of England?" He flapped his eyebrows, and he said, "I don't know that there *is* any." It was a statement of fact — true a year ago Easter, not true now. Why true? Because in so many ways, as in the awful prophecy to the Church in Philadelphia in the Revelation of St John the Divine, we had lost our first love. So much which we consider Catholicism was basically aestheticism. So much which we consider Catholicism was increasingly a form of legalism. So much which we consider Catholicism was a form of escape — perhaps even romantic escape, nostalgic escape, which gave us a wonderful hour or so apart, in which we could leave the pressures of the world and the pressures even of our Church and be at ease in Zion. We forgot

sometimes that there is a deep, profound intellectual demand in Catholicism. We equally forgot that there is such a thing as Catholic morality — that there is indeed an ethical demand. One of the problems about our witness is that some people have become so compromised that they cannot speak and cannot be heard when they do. We have forgotten confession. We have forgotten our need continually to *return*.

And therefore it is the first work of our revival not to have rallies but to have retreats — to enter once again into the redeeming and cleansing and empowering and liberating presence of Christ, that he may restore his image within us; so that when we look at the world, the world can see him, not us; see him, and know the Catholic Christ. We need to meet not to plot but to pray. I think one of the most important things that we must perceive at this moment is our tremendous need to enter deeply into the sanctuary of God and the sanctuary of our own souls. The first action must not be some sort of deep, tremendous expression of our own depression and our own hostility. It must be an action of divine grace in which we receive the Word, the sacraments, and the tremendous assurance of the living presence of the living Lord. I could envision the birth almost immediately of gatherings within our Church which will have a distinct identity and a new purpose: to manifest the attractiveness of the Catholic Christ.

I say this not because I guess but because I've seen it. Last summer I spent a glorious several days in Vadesta, in Sweden, where the Society of St Birgitta was meeting for its annual chapter. This is one of the Catholic societies of the Swedish Church. I met a marvelous company of people — young people, male as well as female — who were gathered there to pray — to live the religious life together. They wore a kind of habit. They had made pilgrimage to this ancient holy place. And I have never seen such Catholic fervor, not even in this Church of St Mary the Virgin. They were filled with joy. And I remember, as I left, something I shall never forget: a powerful old Nordic folk-tune hymn about heaven. As we started to leave after the last Eucharist, suddenly somebody took it up. Someone went to the organ and played it with a beat which was terrific. It made the whole monastery vibrate with a rhythm that I shall never fail to feel. They turned to the rood and they sang. And they wept. And I wept. And the Christ was there. This kind of thing can happen

once again. It may be that we require God's severe shock to our complacency that we should again find God in our Catholicism.

One other thing: we must *remember*. We have come here today to do something in recalling, in Eucharist, in remembrance of Christ. Remember, that remembrance is remembrance not only of Christ in the Upper Room but of Christ in the centuries; and Christ yesterday, today, and forever; and Christ as he has shown himself within our tradition — Christ within that part of our tradition which is ours not only to preserve but to give. Since when have Catholic Anglicans ever thrived when it was popular to be Catholic? Do we not forget our own history? Should we not remember the work of God among us? We barely squeaked through the Reformation with a Catholic Church. It then remained for the Catholicism to be found and to be affirmed, as indeed it was in the 17th century, only to be put down by Cromwell. We had anomalies then: hosts of non-episcopally ordained ministers functioning in our Church — even after the Restoration. Maybe you didn't know it. Remember, there are some forms of ministry that become a footnote. During the Puritan days, the Church lived in exile in France. When, finally, episcopacy was restored, there were a few Right Reverend old gentlemen who were brought forth to continue the succession. And yet we look to that century of persecution and trial, that century of the remnant, as one of the glorious parts of our tradition. And we revere the 17th century divines as the fathers of Anglicanism.

In the 19th century this happened once again. That century brought forth the Oxford Movement. During its first years — 1833-1845 — there was a splendid kind of Athenian purity — a Catholic intellectual renaissance in the University. There were Newman, Pusey, Keble, and the rest — names we revere. Then came the disaster — 1845 — Newman went to Rome and took his disciples with him. Suddenly, the movement felt it was shepherdless. It was depressed. It seemed like the end. Dean Church of St Paul's Cathedral, London, wrote about it, and I brought along a copy of his book — newly published in paperback — and I would read you a word with which he closes his work:

> All the world knows that [the movement] was not, in fact, killed or even much arrested by the shock of 1845. But after 1845, its field was at least as much out of Oxford as in it. As

long as Mr. Newman remained, Oxford was necessarily its centre, necessarily, even after he had seemed to withdraw from it. [But] it ceased to be strongly and prominently Academical, [and] the cause which Mr. Newman had given up in despair was found to be deeply interesting in ever new parts of the country: and it passed gradually into the hands of new leaders . . . Those times [the Anglo-Catholic times] are almost more important than the history of the movement; for besides vindicating it, they carried on its work to achievements and successes which, even in the most sanguine days of "Tractarianism", had not presented themselves to men's minds, much less to their hopes. But that story must be told by others.

We have not come to the end. We have come to the beginning. We have come to the beginning of a new vocation and a new power of the Catholic movement within Anglicanism. It is for us to manifest, not simply among ourselves but for the whole Church, what is the true nature not only of the ministry but of the faith. We are being watched as never before we have been watched. It may be our vocation to act out within our history, in the midst of grievous pain, this curious new experiment, so that God may prove that it is not his will and that it will not work. It may be our curious place in the total life of Catholic Christendom to have the authority of our own tragedy from which to speak. But in the midst of this there must glow the transfiguring fire of the living presence of Christ; so that we are, above all men, not those depressed, downhearted, unbelieving, faithless, and fleeing, but, rather, those who live within this body with a radiance and joy because we know something! And that is that our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He says to us, as he said to that first Church in a persecution far worse than anything we can imagine happening psychologically to us, "I am he who lives and was dead, and, behold, I am alive forevermore, and have the keys of hell and death."

The last words I would leave with you today are these: First, the words of Jesus: "Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." And then the words of the old Introit for Easter Day, sung so many years within this place: "I am risen, and am still with thee. Alleluia. Alleluia."

STATEMENT OF CONSCIENCE

The Statement of Conscience issued by Bishop Atkins of Eau Claire is printed in full on Pages 5 and 6 of Bishop Terwilliger's tract. The following Bishops signed it to indicate their acceptance and support of it:

Richard A. Abellon
Stanley Atkins
William H. Brady
James B. Brown
George Browne
Anselmo Carral
Albert A. Chambers
Roger H. Cilley
A. Donald Davies
William H. Folwell
Luc A. J. Garnier
Charles T. Gaskell
W. Fred Gates, Jr.
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Clarence R. Haden, Jr.
Joseph Harte
E. Paul Haynes
Albert W. Hillestad
Clarence E. Hobgood
Wilbur E. Hogg
Addison Hosea
Walter Jones
William R. Moody
Charles B. Persell
G. Paul Reeves
Melchor Saucedo-Mendoza
William C. R. Sheridan
Robert E. Terwilliger
Edwin B. Thayer
Edward C. Turner
Edward M. Turner
C. Charles Vache'
John VanderHorst
Robert C. Witcher
Robert M. Wolterstorff

In addition, over 200 Deputies to General Convention signed it in their House. Over 200 visitors to Convention also signed it at the CAM Booth. It has also been endorsed and adopted as the Statement of Conscience by both CAM and the CCU.

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